



Know when to say “when”

A look at alcohol and drug abuse



Do you enjoy a glass of wine with dinner, or a beer during a football game? If you're a social drinker, having a drink or two isn't a problem. For others, what starts as social drinking can lead to overuse, abuse and addiction. In fact, about a quarter of Americans over the age of 12 are binge drinkers or heavy drinkers, and 10% abuse illegal and prescription drugs.¹

Alcohol and your health

Light or moderate drinking may be good for heart health and help lower the risk of stroke or diabetes. But moderate alcohol use is no more than one drink a day for men over 65 and women of all ages, and no more than two a day for men younger than 65.² But heavy drinking has risks that outweigh any benefits:²

- Health problems. Heavy drinkers have a greater risk of cancer, heart disease, liver disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression and even sudden death.
- Accidental injuries or death. Drinking too much raises your risk of being seriously hurt or even killed.
- Birth defects. If you are pregnant, drinking can cause brain damage and other serious problems for your baby.

Also, heavy drinking on a regular basis can lead to alcoholism as well as family and work problems.²

Do you have a drinking problem?

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your drinking worry your family or friends?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won't?
- Do you ever forget what you did while you were drinking?
- Do you get headaches or have a hangover after you have been drinking?
- Have you ever gotten into trouble with the police or at home, school or work because of your drinking?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a problem. Talk with your doctor about it.³

What's a drink?

When it comes to alcohol, one drink might be less than you think.²

- Beer: 12 fluid ounces
- Wine: 5 fluid ounces
- Distilled spirits:
 - 80 proof: 1.5 fluid ounces
 - 100 proof: 1 fluid ounce



Sources:

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website: Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (accessed April 2016): samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FRR1-2014/NSDUH-FRR1-2014.pdf.

² Mayo Clinic website: Alcohol use: If you drink, keep it moderate (accessed April 2016): mayoclinic.org.

³ Rethinking Drinking website: What are symptoms of an alcohol use disorder? (accessed April 2016): rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Whats-the-harm/What-Are-Symptoms-Of-An-Alcohol-Use-Disorder.aspx.

⁴ Gateway Foundation website: Effects of Drug Abuse and Addiction (accessed April 2016): recoverygateway.org.

⁵ MedlinePlus, National Library of Medicine website: Drug Abuse (accessed April 2016): nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/drugabuse.html.

⁶ Office on Women's Health website: Alcoholism, substance abuse, and addictive behavior (accessed April 2016): womenhealth.gov/mental-health/illnesses/alcoholism.html.

⁷ Narconon International website: Signs and Symptoms of Drug Use (accessed April 2016): narconon.org.

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Drugs and your health

Drug use is on the rise in the U.S. About one in ten people 12 and older regularly use prescription drugs or marijuana for recreation, or abuse illegal drugs like heroin, cocaine and crack, or methamphetamine (meth).² Illegal drugs – and abusing prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicine, or inhaling household chemicals – can hurt your brain, heart and other important organs. And they all carry the risk of addiction. Some health problems that may come from drug abuse include:⁴

- Heart problems
- Liver problems
- Depression
- Brain damage
- Birth defects
- Memory loss
- Seizures
- Coma

Drug abuse is also linked to major social problems, such as driving under the influence, child abuse and violence. It can lead to missed work or problems with keeping a job, crime and homelessness.⁵

Abuse and addiction

Alcohol and drug abuse are patterns of behavior that cause changes in the brain and lead to addiction. Alcoholism and drug addiction are lifelong diseases that can get worse over time.⁶ Some signs of addiction are:

- Cravings: feeling a strong need to drink or use the drug
- Loss of control: not being able to stop drinking or using
- Physical dependence: getting sick or anxious when you can't use a drug or drink
- Tolerance: needing to use more or stronger drugs or alcohol to get the same buzz or high

For help with alcohol or drug abuse, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services website at [samhsa.gov/find-help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help).

Look for these signs of drug use.⁷

- Sudden change in behavior or attitude
- Rapid mood swings, from irritable to happy
- Withdrawal from family members
- Change in friends or hobbies
- Not bathing or taking care of appearance
- Not being able to sleep, or excessive sleepiness during the day
- Red or glassy eyes
- Runny nose
- Sweating a lot
- Eating more or less than usual
- Wanting a lot of privacy
- Being forgetful, not paying attention
- Lying



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